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# Correspondence Between William B. Arthur and William Rivers Regarding John Polich's Press Councils Questionnaire

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CONFIDENTIAL

Roger J. Traynor, CHAIRMAN

54

TEMPORARY ADDRESS:  
41 East 70 Street  
New York, N.Y. 10021

August 28, 1973.

Mr. William Rivers  
Department of Communication  
Stanford University  
Stanford, California 94305

Dear Bill:

Many thanks for all of the material you have sent. It is indeed heartening to know that someone like you, with your background of experience and expertise in communications is there to help out as we get started in this new endeavor.

David Rubin called last week when Justice Traynor was here. I'll get in touch with him this week and arrange a get-together.

Concerning the Polich survey, I'd like very much for Justice Traynor, our Chairman, to meet with him. Traynor lives in Berkeley. Further, he is planning to attend a meeting at Stanford next week so a meeting should be easy to arrange.

I have sent a copy of your letter, and of the questionnaire, to Traynor, after discussing the project with him. Please ask Mr. Polich to call Traynor at (415)845-1859, which is his home, or at (415)557-1410, his office. Following the meeting we can determine how to proceed.

The Aspen booklet arrived today.

That Florida case is an intriguing one. I got the complete file on it from the Miami Herald and we are going to take a hard look at it for a possible take-off point in a study.

It was great to see you in Aspen and I hope we can get together soon again. There is nothing I'd like better than a trip to California. All I need is a good reason, and that will come along, I am sure.

Best regards,

*William B. Arthur/dj.*  
William B. Arthur

WBA:dj

STANFORD UNIVERSITY  
STANFORD, CALIFORNIA 94305

DEPARTMENT OF COMMUNICATION

REDWOOD HALL  
Telephone:  
415/321-2300  
Ext. 4903

William Arthur  
National News Council  
1 Lincoln Plaza  
New York, New York 10019

*Send to  
Raymond -  
Hemmel  
Polich*

Dear Bill:

John Polich, one of my best Ph.D. students, has been gathering details on what publishers think of press councils. With Mellet Fund money, he sent questionnaires to 489 newspapers--and 25 per cent had responded in the first two weeks. The national news suppliers will be queried separately. The final return should be about 50 per cent, but already the data are proving to be particularly revealing.

The survey gets at more than just approval/disapproval of local and national news councils. It plays these basic questions against the background of the particular respondent -- state, circulation, ownership. Publishers are telling John how well they think their readers understand their operation, how likely they are to cooperate with press councils, and how often they'll print stories from the National News Council.

The responses, like many of the questions, are necessarily a bit speculative (newspapermen want results, not speculation), but with that in mind it seems that Polich will shortly have a detailed picture of what kind of publishers are agreeable to councils, what kind will support and carry national council stories, and what kind will not. There's even a question on whether client-members think the wire services should cooperate with you (it's a close race on that one so far).

This kind of research goes far beyond the simple questions asked by the ASNE and others, which have seemed to indicate a monolithic anti-council attitude, and it looks as though Polich's results will heavily qualify, if not contradict, many of the commonplaces about attitudes toward councils.

If you think this sort of information would be useful to you I'm sure John will be willing to visit New York and talk to you and your staff about his research. He's a Ph.D. candidate (one with significant newspaper experience) and has no money. If you could pay him \$100 and pay for his trip to New York, it might be very useful.

STANFORD UNIVERSITY  
STANFORD, CALIFORNIA 94305

DEPARTMENT OF COMMUNICATION

REDWOOD HALL  
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Ext. 4903

I'll send you the Aspen Handbook in a couple of days --  
when at last I get a copy.

All the best,

*Bill*  
Bill Rivers



STANFORD UNIVERSITY  
STANFORD, CALIFORNIA 94305

DEPARTMENT OF COMMUNICATION

REDWOOD HALL  
Telephone:  
415/321-2300  
Ext. 4903

July 30, 1973;

Dear Sir:

We are writing directly to you to survey attitudes toward press councils because we believe the decision of a newspaper to support or not support them is basically a matter of policy by top management.

The goal of this brief survey is to assess the position of the nation's newspapers toward the new National News Council and toward local councils. A brief description of the way councils operate is on the other side of this page. The questionnaire can be completed in about 10 minutes.

The success of this survey depends on receiving responses from you and some 500 other newspaper executives. The poll by the Department of Communication of Stanford University is the first thorough look at the opinions of you and your colleagues across the nation. The facts you give us will replace the widespread speculation over just what you think of press councils.

We ask that you complete the questionnaire and return it in the envelope provided by August 6.

Your answers will be held in strict confidence. Under no circumstances will responses be linked to specific newspapers in academic or public reports of this survey.

The questions begin on the back of this page. Thank you for your help.

Sincerely,

  
John E. Polich

JEP:aa

Enclosures

## BACKGROUND INFORMATION ON PRESS COUNCILS

Local press councils have been tried in several communities. Generally, they have been formed by newspaper publishers who tried to select members reflecting various points of view in the community. They meet regularly to hear complaints from citizens and from council members on which stories are covered, and the way they are played. Publishers have responded with explanations of their definition of news, of the reporting and editing process, and of the deadlines imposed by mechanical and other considerations. The councils provide face-to-face meetings between readers and editors and publishers, newspaper men who have been free to report council proceedings, investigate reports of error and omission, or ignore them.

The National News Council is funded by several non-profit foundations as an experiment in assessing the national suppliers of news-- the Associated Press and United Press International, the major supplemental news services, the news presentations of the television networks, and the national news magazines. The council includes 15 members from the news business and other fields, none of whom is connected with the media being assessed. The council staff screens complaints about the fairness and accuracy of the national media, and the council will investigate those that may have merit. The council has no connection with government and no power other than that of releasing reports of its findings to the press. The council will also report to the public on assaults on First Amendment guarantees.

PLEASE BEGIN HERE:

Your Name \_\_\_\_\_ Phone ( ) \_\_\_\_\_ Title \_\_\_\_\_  
 Publication \_\_\_\_\_ Mailing Address \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_ State \_\_\_\_\_ ZIP \_\_\_\_\_

What is the weekday circulation of your newspaper? \_\_\_\_\_  
 How many persons make up your reporting & editing staff? \_\_\_\_\_  
 In general, what type of area does your publication serve? ( ) Suburban  
 ( ) Urban ( ) Rural ( ) Other (please specify): \_\_\_\_\_

How many dailies including yours compete in your primary area? \_\_\_\_\_

Is your newspaper ( ) Family owned ( ) Privately held other than by family  
 ( ) A public corporation ( ) Employee owned ( ) Other: \_\_\_\_\_

Is your newspaper ( ) Party to a joint operating or similar agreement  
 ( ) A Member of a newspaper group or chain?

How many periodicals about journalism such as Editor & Publisher do you read regularly? \_\_\_\_\_

To how many groups such as your state newspaper publishers association or the American Newspaper Publishers Association do you belong? \_\_\_\_\_



1. What is the title of the member of your staff most likely to receive and handle a complaint about accuracy and fairness of news coverage?  
☐ Publisher    ☐ Editorial Page Editor    ☐ Editor-in-chief  
☐ City Editor    ☐ A Secretary    ☐ Other (please specify): \_\_\_\_\_
2. What channels in your community are effective in keeping you in touch with reader sentiment? Meetings with: ☐ Service Clubs    ☐ Minority groups  
☐ Consumer groups    ☐ Government officials    ☐ Other: \_\_\_\_\_

---

3. Is your staff instructed to bring public criticism of your newspaper to the attention of top management?    ☐ Yes    ☐ No
4. How satisfied are you now with the quantity of reader criticism you receive?  
☐ Much More Needed    ☐ Somewhat More Needed    ☐ About Right    ☐ Somewhat Less Needed    ☐ Much Less Needed    ☐ Don't Know
5. How satisfied are you with the relationship of your publication with its readers and the public in your community?  
☐ Very Satisfied    ☐ Somewhat Satisfied    ☐ Somewhat Dissatisfied    ☐ Very Dissatisfied    ☐ Don't Know
6. How satisfied are you with the accuracy and fairness of your publication?  
☐ Very Satisfied    ☐ Somewhat Satisfied    ☐ Somewhat Dissatisfied    ☐ Very Dissatisfied    ☐ Don't Know
7. What percentage of your readers do you think understands the operation of your newspaper and the problems you face?  
☐ Almost All    ☐ About 75%    ☐ About Half    ☐ About 25%    ☐ Almost None    ☐ Don't Know
8. Would you be interested in starting a local press council in your community?  
☐ Definitely    ☐ Probably So    ☐ Probably Not    ☐ Definitely Not    ☐ Don't Know
9. If someone else started a local press council in your community, would you respond to requests for information on how you handled a story?  
☐ Definitely    ☐ Probably So    ☐ Probably Not    ☐ Definitely Not    ☐ Don't Know
10. If someone else started a local press council in your community, would you publish its findings, including those critical of your paper?  
☐ Definitely    ☐ Probably So    ☐ Probably Not    ☐ Definitely Not    ☐ Don't Know
11. If you had a voice in forming a "local" press council, would you prefer it was organized on a ☐ community or metro scale ☐ regional  
☐ State wide    ☐ Don't Know    ☐ Not interested
12. Overall, what is your opinion of local press councils?  
☐ Strongly Approve    ☐ Somewhat Approve    ☐ Neutral    ☐ Somewhat Disapprove    ☐ Strongly Disapprove    ☐ Don't Know

15. How satisfied are you with the following? Circle a number from 1 to 5 for each of the three categories. If "don't know," circle "DK."

|                   | GENERALLY    | FAIR/UNFAIR  | ACCURATE/INACCURATE | COMPLETE/INCOMPLETE |
|-------------------|--------------|--------------|---------------------|---------------------|
| Associated Press  | 1 2 3 4 5 DK | 1 2 3 4 5 DK | 1 2 3 4 5 DK        |                     |
| United Press Int. | 1 2 3 4 5 DK | 1 2 3 4 5 DK | 1 2 3 4 5 DK        |                     |

16. The following persons have been appointed to the National Council.

Do you approve or disapprove of them as council members?

Circle a number or "DK" for each person.

|   | APPROVE |          | DISAPPROVE |         | DON'T KNOW |
|---|---------|----------|------------|---------|------------|
|   | GREATLY | SOMEWHAT | SOMEWHAT   | GREATLY |            |
| Roger J. Traynor, chairman  | 1       | 2        | 3          | 4       | 5 DK       |
| Joan Cooney, Children's TV Workshop                                       | 1       | 2        | 3          | 4       | 5 DK       |
| Thomas Curtis, Encyclopedia Britannica                                    | 1       | 2        | 3          | 4       | 5 DK       |
| Irving Dilliard, Princeton  | 1       | 2        | 3          | 4       | 5 DK       |
| Albert Gore, Island Creek Coal Co.  | 1       | 2        | 3          | 4       | 5 DK       |
| Dorothy Height, Racial Justice Center, YWCA                               | 1       | 2        | 3          | 4       | 5 DK       |
| Rev. James M. Lawson Jr., Memphis   | 1       | 2        | 3          | 4       | 5 DK       |
| Robert B. McKay, N.Y. University Law School                               | 1       | 2        | 3          | 4       | 5 DK       |
| Sylvia Roberts, American Bar Association                                  | 1       | 2        | 3          | 4       | 5 DK       |
| Loren F. Ghigliione, editor & publisher, Southbridge, Mass., Evening News | 1       | 2        | 3          | 4       | 5 DK       |
| Molly T. Ivins, co-editor, Texas Observer                                 | 1       | 2        | 3          | 4       | 5 DK       |
| Ralph Otwell, managing editor, Chicago Sun                                | 1       | 2        | 3          | 4       | 5 DK       |
| Ralph Renick, VP& news director, WTVJ, Miami                              | 1       | 2        | 3          | 4       | 5 DK       |
| William Rusher, publisher, National Review                                | 1       | 2        | 3          | 4       | 5 DK       |
| R. Peter Strauss, president, radio WMCA, NY                               | 1       | 2        | 3          | 4       | 5 DK       |

17. How often do you think individuals with ulterior motives will be able to use a complaint to the National Council to gain public attention at the expense of the media?

|              |              |             |         |          |
|--------------|--------------|-------------|---------|----------|
| ( )Very      | ( )Somewhat  | ( )Somewhat | ( )Very | ( )Don't |
| Infrequently | Infrequently | Often       | Often   | Know     |

18. The National Council expects to take stands on government actions affecting the media. Do you approve or disapprove?

|             |             |            |             |             |          |
|-------------|-------------|------------|-------------|-------------|----------|
| ( )Strongly | ( )Somewhat | ( )Neutral | ( )Somewhat | ( )Strongly | ( )Don't |
| Approve     | Approve     |            | Disapprove  | Disapprove  | Know     |

19. What percentage of the American public do you think understands the operation of the national suppliers of news and the problems they face?

|           |          |          |          |           |          |
|-----------|----------|----------|----------|-----------|----------|
| ( )Almost | ( )About | ( )About | ( )About | ( )Almost | ( )Don't |
| All       | 75%      | Half     | 25%      | None      | Know     |

20. What effect do you think operation of the National Council will have on public understanding of the process of news gathering & dissemination?

|               |               |            |               |               |          |
|---------------|---------------|------------|---------------|---------------|----------|
| ( )Greatly    | ( )Somewhat   | ( )Have No | ( )Somewhat   | ( )Greatly    | ( )Don't |
| Improve       | Improve       | Effect On  | Reduce        | Reduce        | Know     |
| Understanding | Understanding |            | Understanding | Understanding |          |



21. How much confidence do you have in the American press?

- ☐ a great deal of confidence  
☐ only some confidence  
☐ hardly any confidence at all

22. How much confidence do you have in Television in America?

- ☐ a great deal of confidence  
☐ only some confidence  
☐ hardly any confidence at all

23. What effect do you think operation of the National Council will have on media credibility?

- |                                  |                                   |                                  |                                   |                                  |                                |
|----------------------------------|-----------------------------------|----------------------------------|-----------------------------------|----------------------------------|--------------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Greatly | <input type="checkbox"/> Somewhat | <input type="checkbox"/> Have No | <input type="checkbox"/> Somewhat | <input type="checkbox"/> Greatly | <input type="checkbox"/> Don't |
| Improve                          | Improve                           | Effect                           | Reduce                            | Reduce                           | Know                           |
| Credibility                      | Credibility                       |                                  | Credibility                       | Credibility                      |                                |

24. What ONE group if any do you think will benefit most from operation of the National Council? ☐ The Public ☐ Publishers ☐ Legislatures  
☐ Courts ☐ The President ☐ Editors ☐ Reporters ☐ Minority Groups  
☐ None ☐ Other (please specify): \_\_\_\_\_

25. As a member of the Associated Press or a client of United Press, do you think the wire services should cooperate with the National Council?

- ☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ Don't Know ☐ Don't take a wire

26. What percentage of the public do you think can tell the difference between good reporting and bad?

- |                                 |                                |                                |                                |                                 |                                |
|---------------------------------|--------------------------------|--------------------------------|--------------------------------|---------------------------------|--------------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Almost | <input type="checkbox"/> About | <input type="checkbox"/> About | <input type="checkbox"/> About | <input type="checkbox"/> Almost | <input type="checkbox"/> Don't |
| All                             | 75%                            | Half                           | 25%                            | None                            | Know                           |

27. Some say the National Council will act as a useful buffer between the media and government. Do you--

- |                                   |                                   |                                  |                                   |                                   |                                |
|-----------------------------------|-----------------------------------|----------------------------------|-----------------------------------|-----------------------------------|--------------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Strongly | <input type="checkbox"/> Somewhat | <input type="checkbox"/> Neutral | <input type="checkbox"/> Somewhat | <input type="checkbox"/> Strongly | <input type="checkbox"/> Don't |
| Agree                             | Agree                             |                                  | Disagree                          | Disagree                          | Know                           |

28. Do you think operation of the National Council will, in effect, result in nationwide standards for reporting, writing and editing?

- |                               |                                   |                                   |                               |                                |
|-------------------------------|-----------------------------------|-----------------------------------|-------------------------------|--------------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Very | <input type="checkbox"/> Somewhat | <input type="checkbox"/> Somewhat | <input type="checkbox"/> Very | <input type="checkbox"/> Don't |
| Likely                        | Likely                            | Unlikely                          | Unlikely                      | Know                           |

29. The National Council will provide independent appraisal of national media performance. Can you list any other sources for effective appraisal?

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30. Is such independent appraisal desirable? ☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ Don't Know

31. What effect do you think the National Council will have on the networks' dealings with the Federal Communications Commission?

- |                                  |                                   |                                  |                                   |                                  |                                |
|----------------------------------|-----------------------------------|----------------------------------|-----------------------------------|----------------------------------|--------------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Greatly | <input type="checkbox"/> Somewhat | <input type="checkbox"/> Have No | <input type="checkbox"/> Somewhat | <input type="checkbox"/> Greatly | <input type="checkbox"/> Don't |
| Improve                          | Improve                           | Effect                           | Reduce                            | Reduce                           | Know                           |
| Relations                        | Relations                         |                                  | Relations                         | Relations                        |                                |

32. How important do you think the National Council is to the future of the national suppliers of news?

( )Very ( )Somewhat ( )Somewhat ( )Very ( )Don't  
Important Important Unimportant Unimportant Know

33. When you receive a National Council story which is critical of one of the national news outlets, will you print the story?

( )Almost ( )About 75% ( )About Half ( )About 25% ( )Almost ( )Don't  
Always of the time the time of the time Never Know

34. How do you think the QUANTITY of public criticism of the media compares with 20 years ago?

( )Much ( )Somewhat ( )About As ( )Somewhat ( )Much ( )Don't  
More Today More Today Much Today Less Today Less Today Know

35. How do you think the QUALITY of public criticism of the media compares with 20 years ago?

( )Much More ( )Somewhat ( )About As ( )Somewhat ( )Much Less ( )Don't  
Reasoned More Reasoned Reasoned Less Reasoned Reasoned Know  
Today Today Today Today Today

36. Do you think effective channels already exist for readers and viewers to challenge unfair or inaccurate reporting by national news suppliers?

( )Yes ( )No ( )Don't Know

37. Do you think these channels are open to readers and viewers without benefit of special office, organization or resources?

( )Yes ( )No ( )Don't Know

38. Do you regard the National Council as

( )Mostly a cosmetic device to cover any problems that may exist  
( )Mostly a club to intimidate the media, or  
( )Mostly a useful means of dealing with public disaffection

39. How often do you think the National News Council will be successful in prompting one of the wire services or networks or other national media to publicly acknowledge an error and publish a correction?

( )Almost ( )About 75% ( )About Half ( )About 25% ( )Almost ( )Don't  
Always of the time the time of the time Never Know

40. What effect do you think the National Council's criticism of a particular national news outlet will have on the long-term performance of that outlet?

( )Greatly ( )Somewhat ( )Have ( )Somewhat ( )Greatly ( )Don't  
Improve Improve No Reduce Reduce Know  
Performance Performance Effect Performance Performance

41. How do you think most daily newspaper publishers feel about the National Council?

( )Strongly ( )Somewhat ( )Neutral ( )Somewhat ( )Strongly ( )Don't  
Approve Approve Disapprove Disapprove Know

42. Overall, what is your opinion of the National News Council?

( )Strongly ( )Somewhat ( )Neutral ( )Somewhat ( )Strongly ( )Don't  
Approve Approve Disapprove Disapprove Know